

Message Text

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11
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /040 W
----- 039524

R 090951Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4104
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 6261

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT TS
SUBJECT: MOHAMED SAYAH WEAKENED IN PSD COORDINATING COMMITTEE
APPOINTMENTS

1. AT COMPLETION OF REGULAR BI-ANNUAL ELECTIONS TO RENEW THE DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY'S COORDINATING COMMITTEES, THE PSD POLITICAL BUREAU ANNOUNCED THE PARTY'S APPOINTMENT OF NEW SECRETARIES GENERAL FOR NINE OF THE COMMITTEES. (THERE ARE 18 COMMITTEES--ONE FOR EACH GOVERNORATE--AND NINE OF THE PREVIOUS SECRETARIES GENERAL REMAINED IN OFFICE.) THESE COORDINATING COMMITTEES SERVE AS THE PRINCIPAL PARTY APPARATUS BELOW THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND ARE IMPORTANT MECHANISMS FOR EXERCISING POLITICAL CONTROL AND FOR MARSHALLING LOCAL SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED. AS BOURGUIBA'S DAY-TO-DAY HOLD ON DECISION MAKING CONTINUES TO WEAKEN, THEY HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT AS POTENTIAL POWER BASES. THE PERSON WHO CONTROLS THE COMMITTEES WHEN THE TIME COMES, WILL HAVE A DECIDED ADVANTAGE BOTH WITHIN THE PARTY AND WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, OVER OTHER RIVALS FOR POWER. IN THE PAST, PARTY DIRECTOR MOHAMED SAYAH HAS BEEN THE UNDISPUTED BOSS OF THESE COMMITTEES. THIS DOMINANCE NOW HAS BEEN CHALLENGED, EVIDENTLY WITH REAL SUCCESS. A NUMBER OF SAYAH'S LIEUTENANTS WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR POSITIONS AS SECRETARY GENERAL AND REPLACED BY MEN WHO APPEAR TO BE MORE CLOSELY

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TIED TO PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA. OF NOTABLE IMPORTANCE, SAYAH

LOST CONTROL OF THE KEY COORDINATING COMMITTEES IN
MONASTIR AND IN TUNIS.

2. THIS POWER SHIFT WITHIN PARTY STRUCTURE HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER DEVELOPMENTS GIVING FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT SAYAH'S POSITION IS WEAKENING. PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA APPARENTLY TOOK PERSONAL ROLE IN NAMING THE NEW SECRETARY GENERAL FOR THE TUNIS COORDINATING COMMITTEE, AND HE ALSO TOOK THE UNPRECEDENTED STEP OF PRESIDING OVER INSTALLATION OF THIS APPOINTEE. IN NATIONALLY TELEVISED SPEECH GIVEN AT CEREMONY, NOUIRA WAS CRITICAL OF BACKROOM POLITICKING DURING CAMPAIGN AND PERSONAL RIVALRIES, REMARKS WHICH HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS BEING DIRECTED AT SAYAH AND HIS CLIQUE. A LEAD AEDITORIAL IN PARTY DAILY L'ACTION ALSO CHARGED, IN GENERAL TERMS, THAT "PERSONS" IN SENIOR PARTY POSITION HAD NOT BEEN WORTHY OF TRUST PLACED IN THEM AND INTIMATED THAT PUNISHMENT WAS BOTH MERITED AND IMMINENT. SENIOR PARTY POSITIONS HAD HERETOFORE BEEN LARGELY CONTROLLED BY SAYAH, AND REMOVAL OF SEVERAL OF HIS SUPPORTERS IN KEY COORDINATING COMMITTEE JOBS GIVES FURTHER INDICATION THAT SAYAH IS THE OBJECT OF THESE OBSERVATIONS.

3. WHILE IT WOULD BE AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION TO SAY THAT THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE ELECTIONS/NOMINATIONS REPRESENT A DIRECT NOUIRA-SAYAH CONFRONTATION, WE DO KNOW THAT RELATIONS AMONG THE TWO MEN ARE NOT GOOD, AND THAT EACH SEES THE OTHER AS A RIVAL FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE. BOTH HAVE BEEN MANEUVERING FOR SUPPORT FROM OTHER POWERFUL ALLIES FOR SOME TIME. THE RESULTING CONFLICT WHICH RAGED AT SENIOR PARTY LEVELS IN MAY, JUNE, AND JULY (SEE TUNIS 3866 AND 5002) WAS MUTED BY THE ANNUAL AUGUST EXODUS AND BY RAMADAN SLOWDOWN WHICH FOLLOWED, BUT CAN NOW BE EXPECTED TO BE REKINDLED WITH EVERYBODY'S RETURN FROM BEACH AND EUROPEAN VACATIONS. ISSUE THAT PROVOKED THIS CONFLICT, I.E., WHO WILL CONTROL PARTY AS BOURGUIBA ERA DRAWS CLOSER TO ITS INEVITABLE END, REMAINS. JUDGING FROM NOUIRA'S APPARENT EFFORTS TO GAIN CONTROL IN THE TUNIS COORDINATING COMMITTEE, THE PRIME MINISTER MAY HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE A CONCERTED MOVE TO MASTER THE CONFLICT BY MOVING TO CURB SAYAH'S POWER ALSO IN
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BROADER SENSE.

4. WITH TUNISIA STILL RUNNING AT HALF-THROTTLE DURING RAMADAN, IT IS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE WHAT LASTING EFFECT THIS POWER SHIFT IN THE COORDINATING COMMITTEES WILL HAVE WITHIN THE PARTY, BUT WE NOTE THAT THIS IS FIRST OCCASION IN WHICH NOUIRA HAS MOVED INTO PUBLIC ARENA TO EXERCISE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN PSD. THIS WILL CERTAINLY RESULT

IN RETHINKING BY HIS OPPONENTS AND DETRACTORS. SUPPOSEDLY
NOUIRA ENJOYS PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S SUPPORT, WHICH WOULD
BE ESSENTIAL TO ANY CHANCES OF LONG-RANGE SUCCESS HE MAY
HAVE. HE ALSO IS SAID TO BE WORKING IN CLOSE COOPERATION
WITH INTERIOR MINISTER TAHAR BELKHODJA AND WITH EDUCATION
MINISTER MOHAMED MZALI, EITHER ONE OF WHOM MAY HAVE
ASPIRATIONS OF BEING THE KING MAKER, IF NOT THE KING
HIMSELF.
MULCAHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARTY ORGANIZATION, COMMITTEES, PARTY LEADERS, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TUNIS06261
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760340-0955
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760975/aaaacmrq.tel
Line Count: 124
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by CollinP0>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MOHAMED SAYAH WEAKENED IN PSD COORDINATING COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS
TAGS: PINT, TS, DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006